

THE BOOK OF REVELATION (NT6225)
Spring 2009

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Description

A study of major issues in the interpretation of the Book of Revelation and exegesis of key passages. Attention will be given to current scholarly and "popular" interpretations of the book in an effort to discern the value of Revelation for the contemporary church.

Books

Required

Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Eerdmans 2001)
Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge 1993)

Suggested

Christopher C. Rowland, "The Book of Revelation," *The New Interpreter's Bible* vol. 12

Web resource: <http://www.luthersem.edu/ckoester/revelation/main.htm>

Many visuals and other class materials are posted on: <http://www.luthersem.edu/ckoester>

Course Requirements

OPTION 1: Designing a congregational study of Revelation

Step 1: Identify the kind of group (youth or adults) and setting (small group, large group, retreat, etc.)

Step 2: Outline the total number of sessions you would want in your course

Step 3: Write out lesson plans for any 3 of the sessions you would include in your course

- Each session should be about 2 single-spaced pages (longer if needed). Use 12-point type. (NOT double spaced).
- Write it as a piece of curriculum (not simply notes to yourself). If you want the leader to present some information, write out some of that information. If you ask a question for discussion, include some parenthetical helps for a group leader, so he or she would have some idea where the question might lead.

The Bible study should include several elements:

(1) An opening. This might be a hymn or prayer, or perhaps an activity that the group would do. Try to do an opening that leads into the study of the text.

(2) Study of the text. You might want to have the group leader offer some background information, or you might want to move directly to reading and discussing a section of Revelation. You might use music, visual media, drama, etc. as part of your session. Be sure to include things that work at several different levels study move back and forth between the

various levels in the course of the session):

- Simple informational components that help people read carefully.
- Interpretive components. Identify things in the text that need clarification or could be taken in different ways.
- Questions of contemporary significance. (Try to be more creative than simply asking “So what does this mean for life today”).
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(3) Conclusion. This could be a hymn, prayer, etc.

Criteria for evaluation: (1) I will consider your content (i.e., how you work with Scripture) and (2) process (i.e., how this would work in a group setting).

Evaluation will be based on the attention to the content of Revelation, the quality of the teaching process reflected in the outline, and turning it in on time.

Deadlines: Due **Monday April 24 by 5:00pm:** Outline of your course and one sample session. The other two sessions are due **Monday May 11 by 5:00pm** (graduating seniors) or **Monday May 19 by 5:00pm** (others).

OPTION 2 Exegetical Study

Step 1: Choose a passage from Revelation that is of interest to you **by April 17**.
Check with the instructor by about the passage before you begin working on it.

Step 2: Identify resources that will help you delve into the passage.
These resources should be cited in the paper and must include the following:

- At least two good commentaries from the bibliography. These commentaries must have been published since 1980. (i.e., Matthew Henry does not count.)
- At least one journal article or monograph on Revelation. For suggestions consult the instructor and check with the reference librarians.

Step 3: Write a 6-page study of the passage (12 point type, single spaced, not double spaced). Cite sources used either in footnotes or in parentheses in the text (author’s name, short title, page numbers) with bibliography at the end.

Evaluation will be based on attention to the details of the text and the larger interpretive issues involved, clarity in writing, helpful use of secondary resources.

Deadlines: Completed paper due **Monday May 11 at 5:00pm** (graduating seniors) or **Monday May 19 at 5:00pm** (others).

Schedule

Reading: During the first three weeks of the course, read all of my *Revelation and the End of All Things* and Bauckham's *Theology of the Book of Revelation*.

April 2 Reading Revelation: Future, Past, or Present?

April 16 Rev 1-3 Christ & the Seven Churches
Rev 4 God on the Throne

Thursday April 16 at class time: Paper topics due for those doing exegetical papers

April 23 Rev 5-7 Seven Seals
Rev 8-11 Seven Trumpet

Monday April 23: Outline and one sample session due for those writing Bible studies

April 30 Rev 12-13 Fall of Satan & Rise of the Beast
Rev 14-15 Judgment & Salvation

May 7 Rev 16-18 Seven Plagues & Fall of Babylon
Rev 19 The Great Battle & Fall of the Beast

May 14 Rev 20 Millennial Kingdom & Last Judgment
Rev 21-22 New Jerusalem

Monday May 11: final assignments due for graduating seniors (papers or Bible studies)

Monday May 18: final assignments due for graduating seniors (papers or Bible studies)

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON REVELATION

Commentaries on Revelation

- Aune, David. *Revelation*. 3 vols. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, 1997-98. Aune provides historical information, word studies, and summaries of other scholars, but gives little attention to theology. The text is difficult to read, but is useful for certain kinds of scholarly information. (*Reference room*)
- Beale, G. K. *The Book of Revelation*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. An extremely long commentary that reads Revelation primarily in light of the Old Testament. Generally conservative, evangelical perspective.
- Boring, M. Eugene. *Revelation*. Interpretation. Louisville: John Knox, 1989. A useful commentary for teaching and preaching. The book works through Revelation section by section giving attention to key issues and reflections on the meaning for people today. (*Desk reserve*)
- Caird, G. B. *A Commentary on the Revelation of St John the Divine*. Black's New Testament Commentary. London: A. & C. Black, 1984 (originally 1966). A non-technical commentary that is interesting to read. Gives attention both to the historical and theological dimensions of the text.
- Koester, Craig R. *Revelation and the End of All Things*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. This study is designed for general use. The introduction deals with perspectives on the book, and the remaining chapters work through Revelation in sequence so that it can serve as a commentary on the text. It is also divided into chapters that can be used week by week in parish Bible studies. (*Desk reserve*)
- Mounce, Robert H. *The Book of Revelation*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. A helpful and balanced commentary from an evangelical perspective. Explores Revelation's meaning for its original readers and includes reflections that are helpful for contemporary teaching and preaching.
- Murphy, Frederick J. *Fallen Is Babylon: The Revelation to John*. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998. This historically oriented commentary deals with the context in which Revelation was written and considers how its message would have addressed its earliest readers. (*Desk reserve*)
- Reddish, Mitchell G. *Revelation*. Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2001. A general purpose commentary that combines attention to literary, historical, and theological aspects of Revelation. Includes side bars with short discussions of special topics and photographs relating to the book's context.
- Rowland, Christopher. "The Book of Revelation" in *The New Interpreter's Bible* vol. 12. Nashville: Abingdon, 1998. Rowland takes a largely literary approach to Revelation, rather than focusing as much on historical questions. The commentary includes reflections on the text for today. (*Desk reserve & reference room*)
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Elizabeth. *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*. Proclamation Commentaries. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991. Considers Revelation in light of liberation theology. It deals with the book's message in light of the powers that oppressed people in the first century and today. The book is short and readable.
- Smalley, Stephen S. *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005. A detailed commentary on the Greek text with some attention to theological issues.

Other Studies of Revelation

Bauckham, Richard. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993. This is a very readable and engaging study of Revelation's theology. Topics include its understanding of God, Christ, the Spirit, and the nature of prophecy. Especially interesting is his treatment of Revelation's hope for the nations of the world. (*desk reserve*)

Collins, John J. *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. This is a very helpful introduction to the world of Jewish apocalyptic writing. It does not deal with Revelation, but discusses works similar to it.

Koester, Craig R. "Revelation and the Left Behind Novels," *Word & World* 25 (2005) 274-282

_____. "Revelation's Visionary Challenge to Ordinary Empire," *Interpretation* 63 (2009) 5-18.

_____. "Roman Slave Trade and the Critique of Babylon in Revelation 18," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70 (2008) 766-86

_____. "The Message to Laodicea and the Problem of Its Local Context: A Study in the Imagery in Rev 3.14-22," *New Testament Studies* 49 (2003) 407-424.

Thompson, Leonard L. *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. Thompson argues that the Christians addressed by Revelation were fairly well adjusted to life in Asia Minor, and that the imperial cult was not much of a threat. His view differs sharply from that of Yarbro Collins and Schüssler Fiorenza.

Yarbro Collins, Adela. *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984. Yarbro Collins works with the idea that Revelation moves in cycles of visions. She makes the case that Revelation did not so much address a time of persecution as it tried to awaken people to a crisis that they could not see.

Examples of Approaches for Lay People

Dawn, Marva. *Joy in Our Weakness*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. Written in popular style with many anecdotes woven into reflections on Revelation.

Peterson, Eugene. *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988. A popular preacher and teacher, Peterson produced the paraphrase of the Bible entitled *The Message*.

Rossing, Barbara. *Rapture Exposed. The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*. Boulder: Westview, 2004. Rossing tries to show some of the political dimensions of rapture theology. She develops arguments against it while formulating a more hopeful approach to Revelation.

Examples of Futuristic / Dispensationalist Interpretation

LaHaye, Tim. *Revelation Unveiled*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999. LaHaye is one of the authors of *Left Behind*. Here he gives a dispensationalist reading of Revelation. E.g., the comments on Rev 4 begin with an extensive discussion of the rapture theory based on texts outside of Revelation.

Osborne, Grant R. *Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002. This commentary follows a futuristic interpretation but gives attention to the historical implications of the text. There is detailed commentary on each passage of the book.

Thomas, Robert L. *Revelation*. 2 vols. Chicago: Moody Press, 1995. This commentary follows the dispensationalist system of Darby, LaHaye, and others, giving a more scholarly rationale for a futuristic reading.